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May 3, 2012

The Honorable Members of the House Judiciary Committee

Dear State Representatives,

The Michigan Association of Broadcasters (MAB) represents 389 radio and television stations, 70% of which have active news operations, serving nearly every citizen in the state. Though we understand the concerns that led to this package of bills, SB 630-633, we need to go on record in opposition. We can see how, in certain cases, keeping the name, especially of a youth offender, out of the media may be desirable, however, there is another option. As part of the defense argument the attorney could request that the records be expunged following completion of the sentence.

We are mostly concerned about the ongoing decline of Public Access to court proceedings in the state. Over the years, other bills have restricted the public access to court records. Our attorney, has advised us that a strong case can be made that these bills are unconstitutional.

The bills are not clearly defined and are too broad in nature. Some of the information sought to be kept from the public is regularly used to describe an alleged AMBER Alert offender in a broadcast AMBER Alert, as would be the case in a parental kidnapping. A large percentage of AMBER Alert perpetrators are parents whose parental rights have been denied or who have a history of drug abuse or may be considered dangerous. The information you seek to keep from the public is important information that helps broadcasters and citizens to bring missing endangered children home.

We respectfully ask that you reconsider this legislation and allow us to work with you to find a solution that accomplishes the purpose of these bills while still protecting the right of citizens to know.

Most Sincerely,

Karole L. White  
President/CEO  
Michigan Association of Broadcasters